

Abraham Lincoln

LEGISLATOR

ORATOR

PRESIDENT

Never a Prohibitionist

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LEST WE FORGET

1839.

Abraham Lincoln Votes Against Local Option

As a member of the House of Representatives of the Illinois General Assembly from 1834 to 1842 Abraham Lincoln was a consistent opponent of local option and prohibition. But let the record speak for itself.

House Journal, December 26, 1839:

"Mr. Webb from the committee on the Judiciary, to whom was referred 'A bill for an act to repeal an act, entitled, "An act regulating tavern and grocery license, and for other purposes;" reported a substitute for the bill entitled, 'A bill for an act concerning groceries,' and recommended its passage.

Mr. Walker of Vermilion moved to amend the report by adding to the end of the first section, the following proviso:

Provided, That if a majority of the qualified votes of the incorporated towns, justices' district, or ward of any city in which said grocery is to be licensed, shall remonstrate against the granting of such license, the same shall not be granted; which amendment was decided in the negative by yeas and nays, upon the call of Messrs. Edwards and Pace as follows, viz.: Yeas, 39; nays, 39; Mr. Lincoln voted 'Nay' on the amendment."

1840.

Abraham Lincoln Votes Against Prohibition

House Journal, December 19, 1840:

"Mr. Ormsbee from the select committee to which was referred the engrossed bill for 'An act to amend an act entitled, "An act to regulate tavern and grocery licenses,"' reported the same back to the House, with a substitute for the original bill, which was read.

Mr. Murphy of Cook moved to strike out all after the enacting clause, and insert as follows:

'That after the passage of this act, no person shall be licensed to sell vinous or spirituous liquors in this state, and that any person who violates this act by selling such liquors shall be fined in the sum of one thousand dollars, to be recovered before any court having competent jurisdiction.'

Mr. Lincoln moved to lay the proposed amendment on the table. Mr. Lincoln voted yea. The motion of Mr. Murphy was defeated by 75 yeas to 8 nays."

1842.

Abraham Lincoln A Temperance Orator

From His Address before the Springfield Washingtonian Temperance Society, February 22, 1842.

* * * "The warfare heretofore waged against the demon intemperance has somehow or other been erroneous. * * *

Too much denunciation against dram-sellers and dram-drinkers was indulged in. This I think was both impolitic and unjust. It was impolitic, because it is not much in the nature of man to be driven to anything; still less to be driven about that which is exclusively his own business; and least of all where such driving is to be submitted to at the expense of pecuniary interest or burning appetite. When the dram-seller and drinker were incessantly told—not in accents of entreaty and persuasion, diffidently addressed by erring man to an erring brother, but in the thundering tones of anathema and denunciation * * * that they were the authors of all the vice and misery and crime in the land; that they were the manufacturers and material of all the thieves and robbers and murderers that infect the earth; that their houses were the workshops of the devil; and that their persons should be shunned by all the good and virtuous, as moral pestilences—I say, when they were told all this, and in this way, it is not wonderful that they were slow, very slow, to acknowledge the truth of such denunciations, and to join the ranks of their denouncers in a hue and cry against themselves.

To have expected them to do otherwise than they did—to have expected them not to meet denunciation with denunciation, crimination with crimination, and anathema with anathema—was to expect a reversal of human nature, which is God's decree and can never be reversed.

When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. * * * When all such of us as have now reached the years of maturity first opened our eyes upon the stage of existence, we found intoxicating liquor recognized by everybody, used by everybody, repudiated by nobody. It commonly entered into the first draught of the infant and the last draught of the dying man. From the sideboard of the parson down to the ragged pocket of the houseless loafer, it was constantly found. Physicians prescribed it in this, that, and the other disease; government provided it for soldiers and sailors; and to have a rolling or raising, a husking or 'hoedown' anywhere without it was positively insufferable. So, too, it was everywhere a respectable article of manufacture and merchandise. The making of it was regarded as an honorable livelihood, and he who could make most was the most enterprising and respectable. Large and small manufactories of it were everywhere erected, in which all the earthly goods of their owners were invested. Wagons drew it from town to town; boats bore it from clime to clime, and the winds wafted it from nation to nation; and merchants bought and sold it, by wholesale and retail with precisely the same feelings on the part of the seller, buyer and bystander as are felt at the selling and buying of plows, beef, bacon, or any other of the real necessities of life. Universal public opinion not only tolerated, but recognized and adopted its use.

It is true that even then it was known and acknowledged that many were greatly injured by it; but *none seemed to think the injury arose from the use of a bad thing, but from the abuse of a very good thing.*
* * *

1863.

Abraham Lincoln, President

From His Reply to Sons of Temperance, September 29, 1863.

"As a matter of course, it will not be possible for me to make a response co-extensive with the address which you have presented to me. If I were better known than I am, you would not need to be told that in the advocacy of the cause of temperance you have a friend and sympathizer in me.

When I was a young man—long ago—before the Sons of Temperance as an organization had an existence—I, in a humble way, made temper-

ance speeches, and I think I may say that to this day I have never, by my example, belied what I then said.

In regard to the suggestions which you make for the purpose of the advancement of the cause of temperance in the army, I cannot make particular responses to them at this time. All that I can promise you is—if you will be pleased to furnish me with a copy of your address—to have it submitted to the proper department, and have it considered, whether it contains any suggestions which will *improve the cause of temperance and repress the cause of drunkenness in the army any better than it is already done.* I can promise no more than that. * * *

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